

U.S. Department of Labor

Assistant Secretary for  
Veteran's Employment and Training  
Washington, D.C. 20210



VETERANS' PROGRAM LETTERS NO. 01-09

DEC 11 2008

TO: ALL REGIONAL ADMINISTRATORS AND DIRECTORS FOR  
VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING  
ALL STATE AGENCY (SA) ADMINISTRATORS  
ALL REGIONAL ADMINISTRATORS, EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING  
ADMINISTRATION (INFO)

FROM:   
CHARLES S. CICCOLELLA

SUBJECT: National Implementation of the Department of Veterans Affairs  
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment and Veterans'  
Employment & Training Service Partnership Project

- I. **Purpose:** To provide guidance to States and Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) field staff on the national implementation of the Partnership Project.
- II. **References:** Title 38 United States Code (38 U.S.C.), Chapters 31 and 41, and Veterans' Program Letter 01-06, Newly Executed Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Benefits Administration's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment and the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service, dated November 8, 2005.
- III. **Background:** VETS and the Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VA VR&E) agree that the successful readjustment of disabled veterans into the civilian workforce is a mutual responsibility and concern. In order to advance, improve, and expand the employment opportunities for veterans with disabilities, both agencies first met in early 1995 to discuss ways to improve the way they serve their mutual participants. In August of that year, the first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the agencies was signed.

Since entering into this agreement, thousands of disabled veterans have benefited from the increased cooperation and coordination between the two agencies and State Agency (SA) Veterans Coordinators, Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff. However, as time passed and workforce service delivery systems evolved, the need to revisit the MOU and related policies and processes became apparent. As a result, the Assistant Secretary for VETS (ASVET) and the Director, VA VR&E signed a new MOU on October 3, 2005.

Around the time the new MOU was signed, the VA rolled out a redesigned employment program for these veterans, known as the Five-Track to Employment Program, which also established an employment coordinator position and job

resource labs. To help Congress understand the status of these initiatives, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) interviewed Department of Labor (DOL) and VA officials, members of national veterans' service organizations, and conducted site visits in five states. Report Number GAO-07-0120: Disabled Veterans' Employment – Additional Planning, Monitoring, and Data Collection Efforts Would Improve Assistance, issued the following findings:

- *To ensure the complete and timely implementation of the agreement, the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should direct VETS and VRE to provide additional direction to the states on implementing the agreement, including examples of promising practices from states, such as strategies for sharing information.*
- *To ensure the complete and timely implementation of the agreement, the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should direct VETS and VRE to provide technical assistance to states that are facing difficulties implementing the agreement.*
- *To ensure the complete and timely implementation of the agreement, the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should direct VETS and VRE to collect and assess complete information on the progress of the states in implementing the agreement using well-designed and appropriate methodology, such as a systematic review of state-level memorandums of agreements or a comprehensive survey of all locations.*
- *To ensure the employment coordinator role is being used in the most effective and efficient way possible without duplication of other available services, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Secretary of Labor, should direct VRE to determine how best to use the employment coordinator in serving veterans located outside the employment coordinator's local area.*
- *To ensure the employment coordinator role is being used in the most effective and efficient way possible without duplication of other available services, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Secretary of Labor, should direct VRE to undertake additional efforts to review how the employment coordinator role has been carried out at the regional level, especially vis-à-vis staff of other workforce agencies.*
- *To ensure the employment coordinator role is being used in the most effective and efficient way possible without duplication of other available services, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Secretary of Labor, should direct VRE to determine how this position could best be used in light of other services available to VA program participants.*
- *To ensure the employment coordinator role is being used in the most effective and efficient way possible without duplication of other available services, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Secretary of Labor, should direct VRE to modify the national employment coordinator position description accordingly.*
- *To ensure that resources spent on job resource labs are used efficiently and effectively, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should direct VRE to undertake additional efforts to review the number of veterans using the job resource labs and ways in which veterans are using them.*

- *To ensure that resources spent on job resource labs are used efficiently and effectively, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should direct VRE to undertake additional efforts to assess and offer regional offices direction on how the labs could be better used.*
- *To ensure that resources spent on job resource labs are used efficiently and effectively, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should direct VRE to undertake additional efforts to determine whether there are additional opportunities to coordinate with other agencies and organizations, such as local one-stop career centers.*

The MOU signed in 2005 provided for the establishment of a Joint Work Group (JWG) whose goal would be to improve the quality of employment services and outcomes for veterans with disabilities. The VA and VETS agreed that the JWG was the appropriate mechanism to establish and standardize processes that would ensure disabled veterans participating in the Chapter 31 program achieve the ultimate goal of successful career transition and suitable long-term employment. This workgroup was subsequently formed. The members of the JWG and their contact information are provided as Attachment 1.

- IV. **The JWG Partnership Project:** The JWG created a partnership project that developed a team approach to improve the referral and employment processes for disabled veterans participating in the VA's Chapter 31 program. The project's goal was to improve the working relationships between VETS, VR&E, and SA staff that serve veterans. The JWG selected eight sites to pilot use of a newly developed Technical Assistance Guide (TAG) and reporting spreadsheet. The TAG provided guidance on implementing an effective referral process, information sharing, data collection, reporting, and strategies to develop job opportunities and secure successful outcomes for VR&E participants.

As part of the partnership project, JWG members conducted on-site visits at each pilot site. Their findings were compiled and an Interim Report was prepared. The Pilot Site Interim Report provides information on the strengths and weaknesses of the project, the obstacles and barriers encountered, and the strategies employed to resolve them. A copy of the Report is provided as Attachment 2.

The partnership project Pilot began in February 2008 and is continuing. Sites clearly demonstrated success in improved relationships between partner agencies. As a result, the refined process and "team approach" to serving disabled veterans in the Chapter 31 program is being implemented nationwide.

- V. **National Implementation of Partnership Project:** The TAG used by the pilot states was revised based on the lessons learned during the partnership project. The new TAG, provided as Attachment 3 to this VPL, outlines the roles and responsibilities of each player on the "team" and the processes that should be followed to ensure veterans that apply for and receive Chapter 31 benefits receive the very best service possible and achieve successful employment outcomes. The TAG also includes a new reporting process, through submission of a new data collection instrument which States will be required to submit on a quarterly basis. The Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (Chapter 31) Tracking Report is provided as Attachment 4.

In accordance with the TAG, SA is required to appoint a DVOP specialist to function as the Intensive Services Coordinator (ISC). In the past, this position was called the Central Point of Contact. SA staff and the DVET will work closely with VR&E staff to mutually develop related activities and responsibilities for the SA ISC including dissemination of information, referral of veterans to appropriate DVOP staff, data collection, and data entry.

Although this is a new staffing requirement not specifically addressed in current State Plan guidance or annual funding modification guidance, many States may already fulfill this requisite by out-stationing DVOP specialists at VR&E offices or through the assignment of a Central Point of Contact. During the implementation phase (FY 2009), States may request a modification for additional funding to support a newly assigned ISC using the guidance in VPL 03-08 although funding is limited. Beginning in FY 2010, these positions will be required as a part of the State's base staffing plan.

- VI. National Implementation Webinars:** The JWG with assistance from the National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI) will host a series of web-based seminars (webinars) to provide information on the national implementation of the Partnership Project. A total of six webinars will be held to maximize opportunities for all stakeholders to participate. The webinars are scheduled as follows:

December 17th – 12:00 pm, 2:00 pm & 4:00 pm (all times are Eastern Standard Time)

December 18th – 11:00 am, 1:00 pm & 3:00 pm (all times are Eastern Standard Time)

The webinars will focus on the following main areas:

- The team approach and how it benefits Chapter 31 veterans;
- The process from referral to placement from the perspective of the Chapter 31 veteran;
- The roles and responsibilities of the "VR&E Team" to include the VR&E Officer, Employment Coordinator, Intensive Services Coordinator, State Veterans' Program Coordinator, DVOP, LVER, and other SA staff, and the Director for Veterans' Employment and Training (DVET);
- The importance of communication and sharing of data among all partners to improve customer service for the veteran;
- Leadership support for the roll-out; and
- Data collection and reporting.

DVETs are strongly encouraged to coordinate with their SA and VR&E partners to select a date and time when all can participate at the same location. Each webinar will be limited to 50 online users, so participants should register for their chosen time slot as soon as possible. VETS remote users may have limited bandwidth which is not conducive to the webinar. Therefore, it may be necessary to utilize a One-Stop Center for participation. **Registration** will be required to view and participate in the webinar and is available at: <http://nvti.cudenver.edu/VETSVRandEwebinarregistration>.

The webinar address is: <https://connect.cuonline.edu/vetsvrande>.

The involved Federal agencies have developed a video with a joint statement from ASVET Charles Ciccolella and Keith Pedigo, Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Policy and Program Management, Department of Veterans Affairs. The video and other resources will be accessible at: <http://www.nvti.cudenver.edu/vetsvranderesource/> Everyone is asked to view the video and review the attached TAG, Pilot Site Interim Report, and Chapter 31 Tracking Report prior to the scheduled webinars. Reviewing these items will provide the proper context in which to view the webinar.

**VII. Inquiries:** Questions should be referred to the appropriate DVET. DVETs or other VETS staff with questions should contact their Regional representative on the Joint Work Group or RAVET. Joint Work Group members or RAVETs may contact Patrick Hecker at (202) 693-4709 or Gregory Green at (202)693-4734.

**VIII. Actions Required:**

1. All VETS and SA staff will work cooperatively with their local/regional VR&E staff to implement the team approach for providing employment services to veterans with disabilities as detailed in the attached TAG.
2. DVETS will, to the maximum extent feasible, facilitate the cooperation, information exchange and mutual accountability of all parties in the implementation of this process.

**IX. Expiration Date:** When rescinded or superseded.

**X. Attachments:**

1. JWG Members and Contact Information
2. Pilot Site Interim Report
3. Technical Assistance Guide
4. Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (Chapter 31) Tracking Report